

THE YPSILANTI DAILY PRESS

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SATURDAY, JAN. 23, 1954

ESTABLISHED 1904

FIRE DESTROYS PRESS BUILDING

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Today just 45 days before the 50th anniversary of the Ypsilanti Daily Press fire swept through the building doing damage extent of which is not yet known. Indications are that the loss will be heavy and that mechanical equipment will be badly damaged.

Arrangements, however, are being made to publish as quickly as possible although for a short time the appearance of the paper may be unfamiliar.

Before the fire was under control offers of help were coming to the Press and this issue is the product of the City Printing Company plant.

The fire spread so rapidly that there was no time to remove any equipment, some of the employees having to flee without coats.

It started in the furnace room.

Ypsilanti fire department worked rapidly and laid lines quickly but were hampered in their efforts to combat the fire because of

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Apologies To Our Readers

With deep regret we are compelled to advise readers of the Daily Press that fire has practically destroyed the Press building, necessitating curtailment of operations today and probably for several days to come.

To our friends we express most profound appreciation. It is only in a time like this that the extreme value of kindnesses can be realized. Everyone has been so kind in offering assistance that we are sure some plan will be worked out to continue publication on a limited scale till new equipment can be put into operation.

Temporarily telephones are being installed in the office of the City Printing Company, 411 West Cross street, and it is from that address that this smallest issue of the Daily Press is being sent out to our readers.

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dense smoke. Low temperature and consequent heavy air pressure fanned flames as windows were broken for hose lines.

Fire resisting floors in a part of the building were of some help, but flames spread rapidly to other parts of the building and to the roof. Whatever is saved from fire in the building has been so badly damaged by water that it will be of little value. The loss therefore was practically complete.

Under handicaps a small edition of the Daily Press will be published in an effort to keep readers appraised of local news, at least. Just where temporary quarters will be located has not yet been determined, but out of several very kind offers that have been received will come some working arrangement.

Although Ypsilanti fire department responded speedily and the maximum hosage was used the blaze was too stubborn and it was necessary to call for help from both Ypsilanti Township and Ann Arbor fire departments. Heat generated by the basement fire soon ignited the first floor and the structure was doomed from that point on.

Ypsilanti firemen had penetrated to the basement area where the main blaze was located but were unable to quench it. Flame shot from the rear door much like a blow torch and smoke of unusual density billowed from windows and vents.

Ypsilanti police department held back the crowd and roped the area off in the event of falling walls or windows blowing out from heat.

The fire swept through newly panelled offices in the second floor and upward through the roof where burning tar turned the smoke from white and yellow to an ominous black.

Police quickly set up a loud speaker system to warn spectators of the possibility of walls caving in. Once, when the heat broke second story windows, firemen beneath were threatened but made a successful dash to safety, as the glass crashed into the street.

When flames leaped through the roof, firemen raised the ladders and directed fire hoses onto the top. Luckily, the walls remained standing.

In efforts to get hose into the basement, other firemen stretched flat on the sidewalk to reach the windows.

Intense heat could be felt by spectators across the street and the smell of smoke filled the entire downtown area.

That Ypsilanti is a friendly city was evidenced from the start. There were quick offers of shelter to the employees who had to leave without hats or overcoats. Mrs. James Breakey provided coat and scarf, blankets from cars were used for quick warmth and Hotel Huron and Ypsilanti Ambulance Company threw open their doors.

Offers of office space were made by business men long before the conflagration was under control.

Picture at the top of the front page today was obtained through the fine courtesy of the University of Michigan which allowed use of the Michigan Daily dark room and engraving machine.

True to training the Ypsilanti Daily Press photographers grabbed cameras and gadget bags and made complete record of the spectacular blaze.

Employees who had typewriters brought them to the City Printing Company long before firemen had controlled the blaze and the news was being put on the linotypes while the water was still flowing on the ruins.

As the staff gathered in printing company building to start publication of today's edition, newsboys gathered at the front door of their new "post" and asked for their papers—business as usual.

Meanwhile, the work of salvage began. Purses and overshoes were recovered as well as such essential items as umbrellas.

Much more important the irreplaceable records in the Pearl street offices were found to be charred but partially usable.

Of great concern to Ypsilanti Daily Press personnel as well as to bystanders was the danger of irretrievable loss of material which had been assembled over the past 20 years for publication of a fiftieth anniversary edition March 10.

Irreplaceable were glass plates of Ypsilanti scenes dating into the past century. Some of these were rescued, soaking wet and with charred containers. Efforts will be made to salvage them. It may be the anniversary issue will have pictures with strange contours but this may add to its historic value.

As the fire grew steadily worse, help began to arrive from surrounding areas.

Water was pumped from as far as Michigan and Washtenaw avenues during the long fight against smouldering flame, with traffic hastily rerouted for blocks around by state and city police.

Long before the flames were under control, gas company men were drilling holes on roped-off Pearl St., to cut off gas mains before fire could reach gas piping in the building. They drilled away one patch of concrete, and struck heavy brick, were forced to drill and hack away a second time.

Crowds were everywhere—on the sidewalks, in the windows, halls and on the roofs of surrounding buildings. As the fire wore into the afternoon whole families came out to watch, to commiserate, to check on friends and relatives at the Press, and to take pictures.

A loud speaker set up at the Ypsilanti Ambulance Company, across the street from the burning press building, warned crowds

to keep away from the walls, and urged parents to keep their children safe behind the ropes which blockaded N. Huron and Pearl streets.

Volunteer firefighters came out in force to help wearying firemen fight smoke, heat and flames. They helped keep back the curious, heaved mightily at tangled fire hose, and worked hand in hand with the professional firefighters.

Off-duty members of the police department assisted the regular shift. Patrolman B. C. Maxwell joined the firemen in manning the hose, although he was not on duty. He got soaking wet. Detective Lt. LaVerne Howard also returned to work and turned himself into a regular "traffic cop" by directing the heavy Saturday afternoon traffic away from the scene.

Police Chief Emil Susterka was on hand to direct activities of his men as was Fire Chief Gerald Kelly.

Today's issue of the Daily Press was nearly complete when the call "Everybody get out fast" was heard.

There would have been a big picture on the front page showing the over all shot of the tragic railway accident in Ann Arbor Friday afternoon which claimed the life of Supervisor Albert Trinkle. Beside it would have been a candid shot showing his hat, lying on the seat of the car as if nothing had happened except that it was framed in wreckage. Ypsilanti Daily Press had printed the only picture of the accident published Friday but was using the follow up for those subscribers who had received the first edition, which was printed before the crash. Mr. Trinkle's Funeral will be at 1:30 p. m., Monday at the Bethlehem Evangelical and Reformed Church, Ann Arbor with Rev. Walter S. Press officiating. Burial will be in Bethlehem Cemetery and friends may call at the Muehlig Funeral Chapel in Ann Arbor, until 11 a. m., Monday.

Molotov provided the day's headline with his arrival in Berlin where the western "Big Three" were already in conference preparatory to the Monday opening of "Big Four" talks.

For Press staff, from Publisher-Owner George Handy to newsboys, the fire was an evermounting horror, as flames spread through the building, and smoke poured through bricks high in the walls.

Shortly after 10 a. m. the entire Press building was humming with activity—reporters wrote their stories, the breaking up of a Village gambling ring, city political and social news—the teletype machines clattered out the national and international headlines, linotype operators set type, the ad alley set ads—and then the cry came from the press room to the news room to "Call the fire department." Thinking it was a routine siren check, a reporter lifted the phone, then was told "It's the Press, quick, we're on fire."

To many veterans, some dry-eyed, others not, it seemed, in the words of Composing Room Chief "Shorty" Starr—"There goes part of my life." But even as the flames spread, plans for the day's paper were being made.

Fires usually seem to happen on bitter cold morning and this one was no exception. Saturday morning crowds were milling around down town when "The Daily Press is on fire" spread through stores and banks.

Within two hours service men of the Telephone Co. had switched phones to the Printing Co.

The big press was built on concrete footings and remains in place. Just how much damage was done can't be determined for heat can play havoc with metal. Most of the down town business men were Press carrier boys at one time or another, Paul Ehman, Frederick Shaefer, Clark Greenstreet, to mention a few and to them it was "their" paper.

While the flames and smoke were at their height, Mrs. Jay Williams submitted material to an Ypsilanti Press employe. She had been asked to bring the write-up in and appeared at the press office about 10:30. It will be printed later.

"The Press Must Go On"—at the height of the fire a full page ad for the Val-U-Way stores was delivered to be run in next Wednesday's paper.

Another incident—a man was standing out in front of the burning building with a classified ad in his hand for Monday's paper.

Another woman wanted to know if she could give a news item to a reporter.

Photographers from 40 miles round rushed to Ypsilanti to "shoot" the burning building. Press photographers as far away as from Detroit newspapers and the wire services stood cheek to jowl with the local staff to snap their pictures. Spectators went as high as the Hotel Huron to glimpse flames shooting from the Press roof.

Note of Appreciation

Only when emergency strikes is it possible to appreciate the wonderful response of the Ypsilanti Fire and Police Departments. It was a tough blaze to fight and men could stay in the dense smoke for only short periods. With tears streaming from smarting eyes they plunged into the billowing clouds time after time. Police aided when necessary and kept the crowd at a safe distance. Bystanders were also helpful in pulling the heavy hose. It is a time like this that demonstrates the wonderful, neighborly kindness of the people of Ypsilanti.